

Food, Masculinity and Gender-based Violence in Sally Andrew's *Recipes for Love and Murder* (2015)

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Summary

This article offers a reading of Sally Andrew's debut murder mystery novel, *Recipes for Love and Murder: A Tannie Maria Mystery* (2015), from the angle of critical food studies. The article explores how the novel's depiction of food relates to notions of masculinity and power against the backdrop of widespread gender-based violence in South Africa today. I argue that the protagonist and narrator's reverent, restorative relationship with food represents a gentle yet powerful feminine counternarrative to the violent masculinities of subjugation embodied in Fanie's dogmatic religious ideology, Dirk's oppressive military indoctrination, and Cornelius's cruel hunting practices. Beyond providing mere escapism, this supposedly "popular" novel can therefore be seen as delivering sharp, timely social commentary.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel beskou die speurverhaal en debuut van Sally Andrew, *Recipes for Love and Murder: A Tannie Maria Mystery* (2015), deur die lens van kritiese kosstudies. Die artikel verken hoedat die roman se uitbeelding van kos verband hou met bepaalde idees rondom manlikheid en mag teen die agtergrond van wydverspreide geslagsgegronde geweld in Suid-Afrika vandag. Ek voer aan dat die hoofkarakter en verteller se eerbiedige, helende verhouding met kos 'n sagte vroulike teenwig bied vir die gewelddadige manlike houdings van oorheersing soos vergestalt in Fanie se dogmatiese religieuse ideologie, Dirk se geharde militêre indoktrinasie, en Cornelius se wrede jagpraktyke. Hierdie oënskynlik "populêre" roman bied dus meer as blote ontvlugting, en lewer stellig skerp en tydige sosiale kommentaar.

Introduction

The narrator and protagonist in Sally Andrew's debut novel, *Recipes for Love and Murder*¹ (2015), is the inimitable Tannie² Maria van Harten. The half-Afrikaans half-English Tannie Maria lives in Ladismith in the rural Klein Karoo and writes a regular *Love Advice and Recipe Column* for the local newspaper, the *Karoo Gazette*. When one of the women who had written to Tannie Maria for advice is mysteriously murdered, Tannie Maria inadvertently assumes the role of an amateur sleuth along with her colleague, Jessie Mostert, an ambitious young investigative journalist who also works at the *Gazette*. Harriett Christie ("Hattie" for short) is the paper's editor and Maria's best friend.

Tannie Maria, the widow of an abusive husband, considers food to be "medicine for the body and heart" (14)³ and she uses her love of food and cooking as her chief weapon in solving this crime. Whilst Maria and Jessie launch their own amateur investigation, the official police investigators assigned to the case are Detective Henk Kannemeyer and his partner, Constable Piet Witbooi, an excellent tracker and descendent of the indigenous Bushmen. Throughout the novel Maria and Henk develop a burgeoning romantic relationship.

As one might expect from a detective novel, the story takes many interesting twists and turns as "the wavering finger of suspicion" passes over a series of potential suspects (to invoke Northrop Frye's succinct typifying of the classical detective story pattern, quoted in Cawelti 1976: 142). The murder victim, Martine van Schalkwyk, had complained about an abusive husband in her letter to Tannie Maria. Thus the prime suspect, at least initially, is Martine's husband, Dirk, a jealous, drunken and rather tragic former soldier. However, Martine also had a girlfriend in the form of Anna Pretorius who completes this complicated love triangle and whose name naturally gets added to the list of potential suspects since her fingerprints are found on the murder weapon.

Then there is Martine's ex-boyfriend, John Visser, an organic farmer with probable motive since he apparently still had feelings for Martine and may

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1. To date, Sally Andrew has published three novels as part of the "Tannie Maria" murder mystery series, the second and third instalments being *The Satanic Mechanic* (2016), and *Death on the Limpopo* (2019), respectively.
 2. The epithet "Tannie" (which can be translated as "Aunty") is a colloquial term ubiquitously used to address middle-aged and older Afrikaans women, and does not necessarily imply a familial relationship. Among Afrikaans-speaking communities, the term is traditionally regarded as signalling respect, if not endearment, for an older woman.
 3. Henceforth any stand-alone page numbers refer to Andrew (2015).

have harboured resentments. Soon, Martine's well-to-do cousin from New York, Candy, arrives in town to oversee the funeral arrangements. It seems Candy might have orchestrated the murder to get her hands on Martine's inheritance. The same may be true of Martine's own brother, David. Another potential culprit is Mr Marius, a local real estate mogul. Martine had thwarted his plans to sell off tracts of land to would-be "frackers" i.e. greedy mining conglomerates hoping to bring the controversial practice of hydraulic fracturing to the unspoilt Karoo. There is also Emmanuel, the burly patriarchal leader of a group of devout Seventh Day Adventists who have just recently rolled into town. Emmanuel is under suspicion because he drives the same kind of 4x4 vehicle as the one driven by the murderer on the day of the killing.

Ultimately, the murderer turns out to be Mr Cornelius van Wyk, the manager at the local Spar, a supermarket chain. Van Wyk had been embezzling money for some time and was caught out by Martine, who worked as the Spar's bookkeeper. Martine had blackmailed Van Wyk, threatening to expose his impropriety should he refuse to give her a cut. This blackmail money would have enabled Martine to finally escape her abusive marriage.

Contextualisation

The first general remark that can be made by way of contextualisation, is that Sally Andrew's novels appear to conform to the realm of popular fiction. I use the label "popular" here not simply to indicate high sales volumes as such, nor to diminish the texts as being "lowbrow", but in the sense that David Glover and Scott McCracken use the term in their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction* (2012) to denote a kind of literature which operates according to a particular set of norms and logic. Popular fiction, according to Glover and McCracken (2012: 1-14), is broadly characterised by (1) its accessibility to a broad readership, (2) its promise of escapism (or what John Cawelti (1976: 8) calls "the artistry of escape"), (3) its adherence to certain generic or conventional plot structures and (4) its potential for generating considerable commercial value. Yet, although Andrew's novels apparently adhere to the logic of this field of cultural production (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) influential phrase), I hope to show with this piece that her novels nevertheless lend themselves to a critical reading and offer more than trivial escapist entertainment.

Secondly, it should be noted that Andrew clearly works within the conventional tradition of detective fiction. Indeed, *Recipes for Love and Murder*⁴ quite explicitly situates itself within this tradition. See for example the overt intertextual reference to Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* when Jessie Mostert, Maria's feisty young investigative journalist friend, is

4. For the sake of brevity, from here on simply referred to as *Recipes*.

portrayed as “the girl with the gecko tattoo” (19). More specifically, Andrew’s novels resemble the kind of “cosy” murder mystery novels produced by the likes of Agatha Christie and more recently by authors such as P.D. James and Alexander McCall Smith. At a metatextual level, the third chapter of *Recipes* is particularly interesting because it prefaces the novel with a kind of “recipe” for what is to come and lists all the so-called “ingredients” for a narrative such as this (see 16 and 17). This might well be read as an ironic bit of post-modernist commentary on the criticism often levelled against popular crime fiction for being predictably generic or written according to some pre-conceived formula. A number of Tannie Maria recipes are literally included in full at the end of the book (363-390). These recipes all feature in one way or another in the narrative. Aside from being part-murder mystery and part-romance, the book is therefore also part-cookbook. Recipe books represent a lively segment of the South African trade publishing sector, which reveals some cunning marketing on the part of Andrew’s publisher (Umuzi, an imprint of Penguin Random House South Africa). In short, the novel poses an interesting example of genre blending.

Read through a postcolonial lens, the book would also seem to activate the notion of postcolonial hybridity at the level of theme and characterisation. Just as Tannie Maria’s idiolect is a hybrid patois – having had an Afrikaans mother and an English father, she acknowledges “the languages are mixed up inside me” (7) – so her recipes are the products of the cultural melting pot that is South Africa. The author, Sally Andrew, herself acknowledges in a postscript (394):

The sources of my recipes are very diverse. Despite apartheid’s best efforts, cultures (and their foods) are intricately interwoven, and “traditional South African” recipes have many influences (including Malay, Indian, Dutch, French and Italian) in addition to their African origins.

One could critically examine each of Tannie Maria’s recipes in more detail to establish whether the recipes are truly hybrid cultural artefacts, or whether they are instead examples of cultural appropriation – hardly a straightforward question. However, that is not the purpose of this article, which focuses on food and gender.

Food as Literary Trope

In his article, “One Reader’s Digest: Toward a Gastronomic Theory of Literature”, Brad Kessler (2011: 151-157) explains that food, when employed in a literary text, can perform a number of functions. It can draw the reader into the text by planting a vivid sensory image in their imagination. It can serve as a memory trigger, transporting characters (or readers) to another time or place. (We find a good example of this on page 70 of *Recipes*: “You can

hold the idea of the best chocolate cake in your mind like a memory from childhood.”) Food can also create a specific mood, help convey an idea, express an emotion, dramatise a situation, characterise people in novels, or increase the realism in a specific text. Most importantly, food is a cultural signifier, “freighted with meaning”, Kessler writes (2011: 156): “Just as in life, food in fiction signifies. It means more than itself. It is symbolic. It opens doors to double and triple meaning.”

In *Recipes*, food is likewise an important recurring trope. Vivid descriptions of food abound. Here are some notable examples:

The fan on the ceiling was going round and round. It was like an oven with a thermafan. Jessie, Hattie and I were all being evenly baked as we sat at our desks. (44)

Her voice was rough but had some sweet flavour, like Christmas cake with stones in it. (53)

His hair was like peppercorns and his skin was wrinkled and yellow-brown like a sultana. (55)

I served him the last piece of snake cake. He smelled of honey, like the cake. (254)

However, food does not merely serve to add literary flavour or spice to the prose; it is quite pivotal to the unfolding of the narrative. The conventional detective story is always set in motion when a crime has been committed – usually murder – which signals a disruption of the social order and the shattering of lives. Anna Pretorius, the deceased’s beloved, is shattered by the news of Martine’s death, which, in turn, is exemplified by Tannie Maria’s shattered muesli rusks on the floor:

Constable Witbooi and Detective Kannemeyer and Anna left Hattie and me standing there, looking down at the muesli buttermilk beskuit [rusk] crumbs, trampled all over the floor. (55)

Some of the most significant clues that lead to the unravelling of the mystery of Martine’s death are food-related, such as the out-of-season pomegranate juice found at the crime scene (see 107, 219, 246 and 273) as well as Martine’s cookbook (*Cook and Enjoy It*) wherein Maria later discovers the key evidence that cracks the case and reveals the culprit (see 36, 103, 283, and 301). Incidentally, Maria owns the Afrikaans version of this famous South African cookbook (*Kook en Geniet*) and it therefore represents a shared frame of reference between the two women, even enabling Martine to communicate with Maria, as it were, from beyond the grave. Maria remarks: “It was a spooky feeling. Like our recipe books could talk to each other after she was dead.” (301)

Olfactory connotations also play an important role in characterisation as perceived through the narrator's senses. Henk is repeatedly associated with warm, sweet and appealing flavours and smells, specifically freshly baked bread (203), honey and cinnamon (254, 256 and 324) as well as earth, rain and nutmeg (321). The pleasant smells associated with Henk are contrasted against Maria's initial impression of Cornelius's body odour which Maria finds dissonant ("He smelled funny. Like spices gone wrong. Too much pepper," 298), a clear textual clue – much like disharmony in a piece of orchestral music would signal some looming catastrophe – that he is the villain.

Gender-Based Violence

There are some environmental sub-themes that surface in the novel, such as the contentious issue of fracking in the Karoo (178, 212-213), organic farming (176) and veganism (166). But the central theme in the novel is the victimisation suffered by women at the hands of men.

There is, for example, the minor character of Grace Zihlangu whose common-law husband, Lawrence, worked as a gardener on the Van Schalkwyk homestead and was killed for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The following interaction is suggestive of the fact that Grace might have been forced into said relationship, possibly against her will:

"Did you love him?" I asked.
"Lawrence?" she said. She looked at the neatly folded pile of men's clothes on the couch and the closed bedroom door. "No." (142)

Among the apocalypse-fearing Seventh Day Adventists there is also a woman (Emily) who appears to be unhappily married to the leader of their cult (Emmanuel). His chauvinistic attitude shines through in the following passage. Just as Emily expresses her desire to run away, her friend cautions:

"But, Emily, if Emmanuel finds out, you know what he'll do ..."
Just then a man came out, that rushing one with the big beard.
"Get in here," he shouted from the front door. "You're late for breakfast."
"Oooh wooo," said Georgie, her hands flying into the air like startled birds.
"Coming, dear," said Emily, and the two women stood up. (164-165)

Above all, the novel highlights the plight of Maria and Martine – whose names bear a phonetic resemblance to echo their parallel struggles – who were both married to abusive men. In her initial letter to Maria (which was anonymously signed "Bereft Woman"), Martine describes the chronic abuse she suffered at the hands of Dirk:

The beatings only happen when he is drunk or jealous. If I don't fight back it's not too bad. He says he is sorry afterwards, which in an odd way I believe, and that he won't do it again, which I don't. Sometimes something snaps. I think it has something to do with his own father and with his time in the army. He has nightmares about the army. Not that I'm making excuses for him – I'm just saying he's not a monster. (28)

Echoing this, Maria narrates her own painful memories of Fanie:

I still feel a bit ashamed when I see people coming straight from church, because I haven't been since my husband Fanie died. All those years sitting nice and pretty next to him on those wooden pews and listening to the preacher going on and on and then driving home and Fanie still dondering [beating] me, kind of put me off church. Being beaten like that put me off believing in anything much. God, faith, love went out the window in my years with Fanie. (8)

The novel provides quite an apt metaphor for the so-called “battered woman syndrome” – as in Martine and Maria's case – where the victim finds herself trapped in a dangerous predicament but seems unable to flee for fear of the unknown. At one point, when Jessie and Maria are driving along at night on Jessie's scooter, they come across a frightened rabbit caught in the headlights:

She stopped the bike, and turned off the engine. But the rabbit still jumped back into the road instead of heading off.
“Ag, stupid thing,” she said.
“It's not stupid,” I said. “Just scared.”
“Scared of its own shadow,” she said.
Because of the lights of the bike, when the rabbit ran towards the side of the road, its own giant shadow leaped out at it, frightening it back into the road. It was scared to stay in the road, because we were there, but it was just as scared to leave. (99)

Sadly, the fictional abuse visited upon female characters in *Recipes* is mirrored by the real-world abuse suffered by many women in present-day South Africa. As alluded to by President Ramaphosa in a Women's Day address on the 9th of August 2020:

South Africa is in the grip of two pandemics – the coronavirus pandemic and the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide. Ever more women and children are being abused and losing their lives at the hands of men. (Ramaphosa 2020)

There are several references in Andrew's novel to South Africa's violent crime statistics that underscore the issue:

“It’s another bastard dondering [beating] his wife,” Jessie said, handing the letter to Hattie. [...] One out of four women in South Africa is beaten by their husband or boyfriend.” (45)

At least three women are killed by their partners every day in South Africa.” (46)

“Fifty per cent of murderers don’t get caught. And our murder rate is five times higher than the world average. Tens of thousands of murderers get away with it. [...]” (268)

These figures are hardly exaggerations. It is especially within this shocking real-world context that it may be said that Sally Andrew’s murder mystery novels pack a powerful punch. Indeed, a number of literary critics have pointed to post-apartheid crime fiction as having the capacity to deliver sharp social commentary, with some even going so far as to claim that contemporary South African crime fiction has supplanted the politically engaged literary works of the 1980s and 1990s. See, for instance, Naidu (2013: 727), and De Kock (2011) who contends that: “In South African writing the well-turned crime thriller is becoming one of the few forms that can combine readability with socio-political analysis.” Warnes (2012: 981) argues along similar lines that popular contemporary South African crime writers “attempt to keep faith with some of the core features of ‘serious’ South African literature: its capacity to document social reality, to expose injustice, and to conscientise readers into different modes of thought and action.”

In the following analysis of several male characters depicted in *Recipes for Love and Murder*, I take for granted the supposition supported by the sociological research of Jewkes and Morrell (2018), among others, that the gendered category of “men” is complex and that one can, in fact, speak not of a single hegemonic masculinity per se, but rather of multiple masculinities.

Toxic Masculinities (Fanie and Dirk)

What Maria and Martine’s parallel testimonies reveal, are two important socio-historical drivers that helped to shape their respective husbands’ toxic masculinity i.e. the power of the church and the state, or, put differently, ideology and indoctrination. Fanie and Dirk’s patriarchal attitudes (and presumably also those of Emmanuel) are rooted in the deeply hierarchical apartheid system in which the old South African Army and the Dutch Reformed Church (the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*) served as bastions of Afrikaner nationalist rule and played an important role in propping up white, male dominance. Maria later returns to the Dutch Reformed Church for Martine’s funeral (“a tall white building, not at all friendly looking”, 237) and is haunted by Fanie’s ghost:

There was an empty space next to me, and the ghost of my husband, Fanie, came and sat down. I tried to shoo him away, but his heavy presence stayed.

[...]

The bad-tempered ghost of Fanie still sat beside me. No mention was made of the husband hitting Martine or the person who murdered her. Funerals are always scrubbed clean of dirt. We sang “All Things Bright and Beautiful”.
(242)

For many years, Maria had felt trapped by the church’s ideology of female subservience, an ideology that was ingrained by Maria’s own mother:

Mandela stood up for women’s rights and criticised violence against women. Sometimes after listening to him, I felt I must just walk away from Fanie. But my fear was stronger. So was the voice of my husband, mother and church: *Staan by jou man. Stand by your man.* (40-41)

Dirk’s toxic masculinity, on the other hand, was forged not at church, but in the army. When Jessie and Maria scour Dirk’s house for clues they come across an old photograph of him and his father:

“That’s the photograph Anna told me about,” I said.
I shone onto another picture amongst the broken glass: two men in uniform.
“It’s Dirk,” I said. Young and without sideburns. “And his father, maybe.”
They were wearing the old South African Army uniform. Dirk was grinning but the older guy had thin straight lips.
“His Pa looks like a mean bastard,” said Jessie.
My husband did his two years in that army. They didn’t train them to be good men. (102)

Like Martine in her letter, the novel does not portray Dirk one-dimensionally as a monster of his own making, but rather as the product of a brutal system. While in hospital and heavily sedated, Dirk is filled with remorse: ““She was a good woman,” he said. ‘I was a bad husband. I broke her arm.’” (152) Later he comes to the tragic recognition that he is flawed and that he has been brainwashed by his military training. Prior to Martine’s death, he had shot her three beloved ducks with a shotgun, having mistook them for “terrorists”:

“Why did you donder [beat] Martine?”
“I’m fucked up,” he said. “Sometimes I just go bossies [crazy] ... I don’t know why.”
“You should get help, y’know.”
“Who would help me? Would you help me?”
“Not me – I’m not your fokken nanny. Haai, jou sissie se vissie, you’re spilling again. I’ll hold it for you. No man, get counselling, join a group of other arsehole men like you.”
“Where?”

“Just look, man. Ask your doctor or go on the fokken vleisbroek Facebook ... I can’t believe you killed those ducks.”

“I know you won’t believe me, but I thought I was shooting the enemy. From my army days. I thought they were terrorists hiding there in the reeds.”

“Christ. You’d better fix yourself up or I’ll fokken kill you, for Martine’s sake, y’know.” (284)

Fanie and Dirk’s particular forms of toxic masculinity are not the only ones borne out by the novel. I would now like to consider, also, the representation of the conventional detective hero (Henk’s) masculinity against that of the villain (Cornelius) as refracted through the focal lens of the first-person narrator (Maria).

A Gentle Masculinity (Henk)

After the newspaper team at the *Gazette* start receiving death threats from the killer, Henk and his colleagues at the police station take turns to guard Maria at her homestead (because she lives on her own on a smallholding outside of town). Maria prepares a meal for herself and Henk and she reacts with shock when, first, he touches her face “with gentleness” (203) and then lays the table and dishes up for her: “I was staring at the plate and the table with wide eyes. I had never seen a table and a plate dished up by a man before. It looked fine.” (204) Later, Henk takes the initiative and actually prepares breakfast:

“Hope you like scrambled eggs,” he said, beating the eggs in a bowl.

[...]

“It’s about all I know how to make,” he said. “And when I put the chickens in the hok there were some eggs there, waiting.”

He opened my fridge. How did this man make his way into my chicken hok [coop], my kitchen, my fridge? (249)

Maria expresses mild amazement at the idea that Henk can comfortably enter domestic spaces such as the chicken coop, the kitchen and the fridge. These are spaces that have historically been regarded as stereotypically female domains (Blumberg 1998: 195; Ashley et al. 2004: 163), and even more so within traditional agrarian societies like the Karoo. Maria’s mild surprise reveals as much about her own prejudice as it does about the society within which the novel is set. Earlier on, Maria casually perpetuates the stereotype that men never buy lettuce for themselves:

“I don’t know what it is about men and salad, but I’ve never heard of a man buying lettuce for himself. [...]” (105)

Presumably, Maria’s stereotypical view of men and their relationship to food involves the association between meat and masculinity (discussed at length in

the following section of the article), rather than lettuce itself. Henk nevertheless challenges Maria's prejudices and introduces her to a gentler form of masculinity. Even his eggs get her seal of approval ("The eggs were delicious. Light and fluffy", 253) – note that the adjectives "light" and "fluffy" are decidedly non-macho descriptors – thus affirming that Henk's masculinity is not threatened by his entering a stereotypically feminine domain. Eggs suggest birth and life – despite the fact that the characters are consuming them – and this, too, could signal a move away from the meat/masculinity construction.

Toward the end of the novel, Henk adopts a little lamb (Kosie), the archetypal Christian symbol of meekness, which he treats with affection (359, 361). Henk's kind treatment of Kosie the lamb is contrasted against the murderer, Cornelius van Wyk's cruel relationship to animals and his cold, instrumentalist relationship to food.

A Violent Masculinity (Cornelius)

Van Wyk explicitly constructs his identity around being a hunter. After having kidnapped Maria, he proclaims proudly: "I'm a hunter." (305) When they enter his lair, Maria notices that it is adorned with trophies of dead animals:

He made me walk ahead of him, into a lounge with big leather couches and a cement screed floor covered in mats made from the skins of wild animals. On the walls were the stuffed heads of animals with long horns, staring at me with glassy eyes. Through a door I could see a kitchen with wide metal counters. He pushed aside a zebra skin with his foot. Underneath was a wooden trapdoor. (306)

Van Wyk forces Maria to descend into a large walk-in refrigerator where multiple animal carcasses are hanging from the roof:

This was not a room for living things.
[...]
I touched its shoulder. The body was very cold, but not frozen. Its fur was bristly, and I realised it was a klipspringer.
"What kind of man would kill a klipspringer?"
I hugged my arms around my body, glad for every gram of fat I had. As I moved around the giant fridge, I rubbed my hands together and blew on my fingers. In the dim light I saw six more hanging bodies. My tummy was in a knot, but I made myself check each one.
A young kudu, his horns just starting to curve.
A female eland.
Two steenbuck, a male and a female. I wondered if they were mates.
A baby zebra.

And a mama zebra, who looked pregnant to me.
I am no expert on hunting, but I know there are some rules, and this man
didn't care about them. He was also killing animals in summer when the
hunting season was in winter. (307-308)

This macabre scene serves to underscore the depravity of the villain, because not only does he disregard seasonal hunting regulations, he kills far more animals than one man can reasonably consume by himself – including young animals, small antelope such as the klipspringer and steenbok (who do not offer much in the way of meat anyway), and pregnant mothers. So, Cornelius kills not simply for sustenance but for the sake of gratuitous violence i.e. blood sport.

Hunting presents quite an apt analogy within the genre of detective fiction: On the one hand, the murderer/criminal/predator hunts his victims and threatens to strike again while still on the loose. On the other hand, he is also *being* hunted by the detective/s, whether professional or amateur. In *Recipes*, the following description of insects circling a light and a praying mantis lying in wait evokes the recurring hunting motif:

The insects were thick around the light now. Big moths, a green praying
mantis, and some other little flying things
[...]
The moths were all throwing themselves at the light. The mantis was sitting
next to it. Hunting. (291)

In the climactic scene that follows, the murderer forces Maria to cook a piece of steak for him: “On the stove was a big cast-iron frying pan and next to it was a wooden board with three fillets of meat. There was also a jar of beetroot and a bean salad from the Spar. ‘Now you go ahead and cook those steaks,’ he said. ‘That meat is really fresh.’” (310) The murderer then explains his construction of a violent masculine identity which is inextricably tied to hunting:

“I’m the fittest of the fit. A predator. Looking out for myself.” He took a comb from his pocket and combed his few hairs across his head.
“Without care or love you are nothing, just a lonely man,” I said, turning the steak.
“I like being alone. Though I do miss a good cook,” he said, putting his comb away. “And when I need, what is it you people call it?” His gaze jumped around as he spoke, his pupils moving like water beetles on a pool. “Closeness, intimacy, then ... I hunt.” (312)

Cornelius elaborates:

“But the chase”, he said, “is so important. Killing – bang, bang, you’re dead – has its pleasure, but it’s just not the same”. He cut into the meat. “Of

course, I try for a clean shot but when an animal is wounded, and I have to track it down, then the hunt is even better.” He chewed. “I always find it, you know. Usually it’s dead, but sometimes it’s weak, and waiting for me to put it out of its misery. And I do.”

He smiled. His eyes were empty as ice. As he ate his fillet, a bit of blood leaked out of the corner of his mouth. (313)

Hunting is perhaps the epitome of an imbalanced power dynamic since what is implied by the hunting analogy is an assertion of dominance by the male hunter over the objectified and abject Other, whether animal or woman. Earlier, as Cornelius and Maria are driving along a gravel road, Cornelius deliberately tries to run over a grazing kudu:

There was a kudu in the road. The sun seemed to be shining through its ears as it looked at us with wide black eyes.

Van Wyk didn’t slow down. It leaped away, just in time, over a spiky bush. My mouth sucked in air. Van Wyk laughed.

“I’ve only once got one like that,” he said. “Too messy. Damages the car. I prefer the bow and arrow.” (306)

He then explains that he hit Jessie on her scooter in precisely the same manner:

“I knocked her down.”

“You knocked her down?”

I was sounding like an echo, but I couldn’t help myself. I needed to hear about Jessie.

“Oh, she was okay, only out of it for a minute or two. Her leg was a bit damaged, though. A pity. I was hoping she’d be a runner.” (306)

The targeted animal is thus associated with the female victim. As Carol Adams (2000) has authoritatively argued in her study, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, meat-eating in Western society has been shown to be closely aligned with male dominance and possession and involves the linked objectification and subordination of both animals and women. Unlike animals, women can rebel through vegetarianism which then becomes a political statement: a rejection of patriarchal power and values, an expression of feminism, and a claiming of female over self and nature.

Noir Guilt

It is interesting to note that, as a meat eater, and in typical *noir* fashion, Maria is not entirely excluded from guilt. While trapped inside Van Wyk’s fridge, she opens the freezer and comes to a startling realisation:

Inside, there was a light, and I could see plastic bags of meat. Mince meat, sausage, steaks. There was no packaging on it, but it looked a lot like the game meat I had bought from the Spar. (309)

Maria had therefore inadvertently consumed some of Van Wyk's illegal game meat. She also eats a piece of steak with Van Wyk, not knowing whether it is a piece of Jessie's flesh or not. She is therefore, in a way, tainted by Van Wyk's crimes. This is reminiscent of the conventional *noir* detective hero who is often forced to confront his/her own culpability and moral ambiguity.⁵

Recipes for Love and Murders is not a straightforward critique of meat-eating or a treatise in defence of veganism though. In fact, the only real vegans in the novel, the Seventh Day Adventists, are caricatured. There might be some scope for a critical reading of the text from an animal studies angle, since meaningful intersections have been pointed out by ecofeminists between the objectified animal body (subjugated and mass-produced by the meat industry for human consumption) and the objectified (object) female body.⁶

Maria's Relationship with Food

This brings us to the representation of Maria and her complex relationship with food. Maria finds comfort in food, even turning to grocery shopping as a form of therapy:

I made me feel peaceful, just being in the grocery store, looking at those piles of fresh fruit and vegetables. Bananas, apricots and melons. That sweet smell of ripe spanspek. I peeled a banana and ate it. I started to think straight again so I went to the bakery counter and bought four doughnuts and ate one. (272)

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5. In *The Satanic Mechanic* (2016), the decidedly darker sequel to *Recipes for Love and Murder*, Maria actually grapples with the uncertainty and guilt of having possibly murdered her husband. In the end, she is vindicated when it emerges that he had succumbed to a heart attack, not suffocation, but Maria is nonetheless troubled by it.
 6. Human-animal imagery and personification are perhaps even more abundant than food metaphors throughout the novel. As noted earlier, the battered wife is metaphorically allied to the image of a frightened rabbit (99) and Grace Zihlangu is, at one stage, beautifully compared to a kudu (121). One of the most striking human-animal metaphors in the novel is an image of a butterfly representing female strength (267). It is also telling that Maria should identify with a "dull" little steenbok (218) and that Henk, the quintessential detective hero, should appear to be the only man capable of noticing the elusive steenbok (253).

At one point, Maria receives a letter from a contributor, “Lost Lucy”, who demands to know what “really matters” in life: “Family? Duty? God? Friends? Food? Love?” (171). Tannie Maria responds by saying:

In the end what matters most is love and food. Without them you go hungry. And you need them to enjoy all of the other things you wrote about. (172)

Tannie Maria’s philosophy is therefore reminiscent of M.F.K. Fisher’s, one of the most influential writers in the field of culinary literature, who writes in the preface to *The Gastronomical Me* (quoted in *The New York Times*, 1991):

It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it; and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied; and it is all one.

Maria also believes in the undeniable healing power of food. See, for instance, the food she takes to Jessie in hospital (351) and the recipe she “prescribes” for Karel/Kobus, a man who had written to Tannie Maria for dating advice, when he is struggling with premature ejaculation:

Then I gave him a recipe for a chocolate cake [...] a fluffy chocolate mousse cake, made with dark chocolate. The recipe required a long time to beat the eggs and sugar to make them very thick and frothy, and the cake topped with cream and berries. (278)

While comical, premature ejaculation is perhaps one of the most emasculating male sexual health problems next to impotence or erectile dysfunction, so the idea that a chocolate cake can provide the solution has interesting implications for notions of male virility.

Food as Religion

By her own admission, Maria does not “believe in God or church or anything” (131). In a sense, food is her true religion. If the world should come to an end – as the Seventh Day Adventists insist will happen shortly – Maria says she would not spend her time praying or ascending, she would “probably cook something nice” (132). Sitting in her kitchen, eating a vetkoek and mince, she has something of an epiphany:

There in my kitchen, eating that vetkoek and mince, I had the sort of feeling I’d expect you should have when you go to a church you have faith in.
[...]

I said I didn't believe in anything, that my faith went out the window, but maybe this wasn't true. I believed in vetkoek with curried mince, and all the tannies who made them. If the end of the world was coming, this was the meal I'd make. (134-135)

Her belief in food is also why Maria resorts not to prayer, but to talking about food when her friend Jessie is in a critical condition in hospital (342). Maria also speaks directly to food, which might be viewed as a kind of secular substitute for prayer. See, for instance these excerpts:

"I messed up," I said to the cake. "If he had a taste of you, he would have agreed to anything I asked." (67)

"We've got a murder to investigate," I told the rusk, which I hadn't eaten. (226)

I smiled. They were a golden buttery colour, with brown crunchy toasted seeds and dark chewy raisins. There were at least fifty of them. And rusks are just the best company. (350)

In another bit of metatextual self-reflexivity, the narrator brings her rusks "up to speed" as the story unwinds: "'The Spar manager was the murderer', I told the rusks as we drove. 'He nearly killed me, but Henk shot him. Dead. We found Jessie. Alive. But injured and unconscious. It could be bad. We are going to the hospital now. This time you lot are coming in with me.'" (340) From a narratological point of view, it is tempting to imagine that we, the implied readers, are thus effectively placed in the position of the mute, ever-quietly listening rusks.

Maria's reverent attitude toward food is somewhat akin to Constable Piet Kleinbooi's view of nature which harkens back to the ancient animistic worldview of his hunter-gatherer forebears, the Bushmen. Consider the following scene where Piet is seemingly able to communicate with an ancient tree:

We came to a big gwarrie tree. Piet nodded to it as if he was greeting an old woman, then he crouched on his haunches in its shade.

[...]

Gwarries grow very slowly, and the trunk of this one was thick – it must have been a few thousand years old. Piet's people, the Bushmen, had been around many thousands of years. He said something I couldn't hear to the tree before we stepped out again into the patchy shade of the riverbed. (227, 228)

For Maria, food holds the same kind of "magical" power. It can comfort, heal, provide companionship, and even help to facilitate the solving of a crime and the restoration of justice. Maria's story of food thus represents a gentle yet powerful feminine counter-narrative to the violent masculine narratives of

dominance and subjugation embodied in 1) Fanie's dogmatic religious ideology, 2) Dirk's oppressive military indoctrination, and 3) Cornelius's cruel hunting practices.

Conclusion

In sum, what has been shown by my analysis of Sally Andrew's *Recipes for Love and Murder*, is that the representation of food and masculinity intersect in interesting and complex ways in this supposedly "popular" murder mystery novel. While the book appears to adhere to the escapist logic that governs the field of popular fiction, it nonetheless packs a powerful punch in terms of its critique of real-world societal issues, specifically with regard to masculinity and subjugation, and offers ample food for thought. The book was published within the context of a veritable pandemic of gender-based violence in South Africa, which makes the social commentary it delivers ever more poignant.

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